

HELPING COMMUNITIES ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE FOR A HEALTHIER NEW MEXICO



The health and well-being of New Mexicans is increasingly at risk because of climate change. We must take action to protect our communities from its ever-increasing effects.

THE PROBLEM

Climate change is increasingly harming the health of New Mexicans, and the rate of its associated extreme weather events, such as periods of extreme heat, drought and flooding – along with wildfires and air pollution – is quickly accelerating. These hazards impact our physical and mental health in many ways, including increased rates of heat stress, insect-borne diseases, lung and heart disease, and allergies, which can lead to many downstream effects such as financial and food insecurity and a deterioration in overall well-being. New Mexico's children, communities of color, older adults, people with disabilities, and families earning low incomes are most likely to suffer serious, long-term health consequences from these climate impacts.

BY THE NUMBERS

- New Mexico now has an average of **50 more days** of extreme wildfire risk conditions (hot, dry, windy) than in 1970.¹
- New Mexico saw an **18% increase** in respiratory emergency room visits during the wildfire season, compared to previous years.²
- The number of emergency room visits for heat-related illness in New Mexico **more than doubled** between 2009 and 2019.³

THE SOLUTION

We need to protect all New Mexicans from threats to our health caused by extreme weather events related to climate change, which are causing harm today and will be more frequent and intense in the future. New Mexico can address these threats to public health by:

- Creating a **Climate and Public Health Program** at the Department of Health to build capacity and expertise, support development and implementation of response systems, and improve interagency collaboration.
- Establishing a **Public Health and Climate Resiliency Fund** to assist and enable local and tribal communities to adapt to climate change and respond to public health emergencies from extreme weather events.

These two approaches, combined with meaningful engagement with communities most harmed by climate change, will help improve health outcomes, equity, climate adaptation, and climate resiliency in New Mexico.

Endnotes

1. "Fire Weather: Heat, dryness, and wind are driving wildfires in the Western U.S.," Climate Central, Aug. 25, 2021
2. Environmental Public Health Tracking Program, New Mexico Department of Health
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network, accessed 10/21/2022: www.cdc.gov/ephtracking

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